

Poetry in Raga-s or Raga-s in Poetry

(Studies in the Concept of communication in poetry)

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Some Poetry communicates like literature some like Music or Painting. The poetry which communicates like literature uses literary devices whereas poetry communicating like music or painting uses their non-referential devices. But sometimes its boundary blurs and the relative importance of their component parts defines a category. *Bharatmuni*(2nd century) defines '*Gaandharva*' as a composition of *Swara* (notes), *tala* (rhythm) and *pada* (words) and differentiates it (*Gaandharva*) from '*gaan*' on the ground that *Gaandharva* gives more importance to '*Swara*' and '*tala*' whereas '*Gaan*' is primarily '*pada*' centered compositions.¹ *Swara* and '*tala*' are musical devices whereas '*pada*' is literary one. *Abhinavgupta*(950-1030A.D.) later elaborates it in *Abhinav-Bharati* further that the importance of *pada* in '*gaan*' is of one type whereas in '*Gaandharva*' is of different type. *Swara* and *tala* are important in *Gaandharva* and since it is impossible to present it without any vehicle, *pada* as a vehicle becomes useful ----that's the reason why *pada* is said to be felicitator (*anubhavaka*) of *Swara* and *tala* here.²

Another category that had been developed in Sanskrit in this context is of raga poetry or '*ragakavya*'. It can be traced at least at the time of *Kohal* (3rd century), who defined and classified it as a subcategory of '*uproopak*' and that was later quoted by *Abhinavgupta* in '*Abhinav-Bharati*'.³ *Abhinavgupta* cites two examples of this subcategory----- '*Raghav-vijay*' and '*Marichvadham*' and informs us that the former work was based on '*Thakka*' raga and later work was composed in raga '*kukubh*'. Basically, *Ragakavya* was meant to be enacted with dance-----but it can be sung too as a song. It is composed in a single or multiple raga and '*dhruvak*' or '*sthai*' and '*antara*' is also used in it...*Jayadev's* '*Gita Govinda*' is a pioneer work in the tradition of '*Ragakavya*'.⁴ but before '*Gita Govinda*', '*charyapada*' of *siddha* poetry (8th to 12th century) also indicates raga and this lyric style came down to Hindi Poetry after bifurcating into two streams----- in one stream the Sanskrit poets like *Kshemendra* and *Jayadeva* adopted and developed it after getting influenced by *Apabhramsha* poets ---this tradition was adopted from *Jayadeva* by *Maithili* poets like *Vidyapati* and that was later popularised by *Krishnaite* poets. In the other stream the lyric style of *siddhas* was developed by the *Nath panthi yogis* and *maharashtrian* saints that later came down to Hindi saint poets.⁵ So a tradition was established in north-India where music or raga became a part of communication-strategy; and in this regard there was no

difference between 'saguna' and 'nirguna'; 'krishnabhakta' or 'Rambhakta', prem-margi or gyan margi. The case of Adigranth⁶ is important here to elaborate. The structure of this great Book is imagined by classifying its contents on the basis of various Ragas. After initial three *vanis*, the whole bulk of poems are arranged in thirty one Ragas.⁷ The same is the case with Sindhi Poetry where "The thematic relationship between musical mode and sindhi mystical poetry is demonstrated explicitly in early manuscripts in which poems were arranged in chapters according to the *sur* in which they were intended to be sung. The first collection to be so arranged was that of Miyan Shah Inat (Inayatullah Rizvi), whose poems were grouped under nineteen *surs*. The great classical compendium of Sindhi mystical poetry, Shah Abdul Latif's *Risalo*, is arranged into thirty chapters, each devoted to a *sur*, and most of these are associated with either a specific folktale or a certain theme."⁸

There were, it seems two ways of presenting poetry in the North-Indian tradition ----- one way was reciting and the other was singing. Both this tradition were developed, it seems in the process of acquiring better skill for communication. Recitation requires familiarity with meter (*chhand*) whereas knowledge of raga is must for singing. It is no coincidence that before elaborating various ways of Poetry- recitation in his '*Kavyamimansa*', Rajshekhar(10th century) establishes the importance of recitation in no unclear terms: "Experts in poetry-writing somehow may compose poems but only accomplished can recite poetry".⁹ *Prabandha* or larger work was meant for recitation so *prabandha* like *Ramcharitmanas* mentions *chhand*'s name whereas smaller work or *muktak* was for singing ; no wonder most of the Padas of Kabir, Meera , Surdas or Tulsi's '*Vinay Patrika*' and '*Geetavali*' indicates raga's name.¹⁰ But both the traditions were one in aiming *rasa* as fruition.

Kshemendra (990-1065A.D.) prescribes poets that they should select meter (*chhand*) according to the described subject and *Rasa* in the poetry.¹¹ Bhanu kavi also provides a table of favourable and unfavourable meters according to *rasa* and described subject-matters. But he emphasizes that it is truer for Sanskrit, whereas in Bhasha, meters like *Doha*, *Choupai*, *Sorath*, *sawaiyya*, *Kavitta* etc. are suitable for all kinds of *rasa* and subject.¹²

The question of relation between *Raga* and *Rasa* has been addressed since *Natyasastra*. When Bharatmuni discusses '*The occasions and rasa-s of the dhruva-s*', he says:

"There are two kinds of occasions: one which relates to others, and one which relates to oneself.

"The *Apakrsta dhruva* should be sung in the *karuna rasa* on the following occasions: when captured, when obstacles are encountered, during a fall, illness, fainting or death.

"A *Sthita dhruva* (a *dhruva* with the *Vilambita laya*) should be sung on these occasions: when in a desperate hurry, when dissimulating, when worried, when tired, when extremely depressed, when in despair.

"When these emotions are being expressed in the karuna rasa, the karuna emotions should be expressed in the Druta laya.

"Grief on personally seeing someone dead or wounded should be acted in the Sthita (Vilambita) dhruva and the karuna rasa.

"The dhruva should be sung in the Druta laya on these occasions: on seeing unexpected calamities, when intensely happy, on seeing something astounding, when depressed, when pleased, in anger, on seeing heroic acts, when personally reporting the heroic, the furious and the terrible. The dhruva should be sung in the Druta laya on occasions of excitement.

"The Prasadiki dhruva should be sung in the Madhya laya on these occasions: when pacifying another, when making a request, when remembering (various things), when making an exaggerated speech, in a first meeting, on seeing the unusual in love.

"The Antara Dhruva should be sung continuously when there is physical distress, in anger and when wielding weapons.

"The dhruva should not be sung when the character enters weeping or singing, or when there is a hasty action, or when giving a message, or if a mishap (falling, stumbling, etc.) or something surprising occurs when entering.

"The dhruva-s should thus be used after taking into consideration the theme, the region, time, season, the characters and emotions."¹³

The relation of a raga to the mental state is a complex albeit intriguing proposal. Acharya Brahaspati in his pioneering work '*Bharat ka sangeet sidhant*' proposes a clear cut relationship between sthayee swar, rasa and sthayee bhava:¹⁴ [Table-1]

Major Notes (Sthayee Swara)	Rasa	Major Emotions (Sthayee Bhava)
Shadaj (sa)	Valour(Veer),Splendid(Adbhut), Terror (Raudra)	Enthusiasm(Utsah,)Wonder(vismai), Anger(krodha)
Risabh (re)	do	do
Gandhar (ga)	Pathos(Karun)	Sorrow(shoka)
Madhyam(ma)	Erotic (Shringar), Humour (Hasya)	Love(Rati), Laughter (Haasa)
Pancham (pa)	do	do
Dhaivat(dha)	Disgust (Vibhatsa),Dread (Bhyanak)	Fear(Bhaya),Repulsion(Jugupsa)
Nishad (ni)	Pathos(Karuna)	Sorrow(shoka)

[Table - 1]

Omkarnath Thakur, the great musician of 20th century India once remarked that it is not merely the notes which produce a mood but also various other factors like graces, tempo, and octave levels and so on. According to him those raga-s moving in the upper octaves are never sombre and dignified; they express faster emotions like anger, excitement and

enthusiasm. Those with an emphasis on Sa-Ma relation are peaceful and mature. Raga-s of Khamaj group are erotic and lighter in vein. Those with ri, dha, and Ma have pathos predominantly; and raga-s with ri, dha, and ma show tiredness, lack of enthusiasm etc. ¹⁵

Let us consider the poems and it's indicated raga-s of four major poets of Bhakti period ---- Kabir, Surdas, Meera & Tulsidas. The 403 Padas of Kabir in Shyam sunder Das edition sixteen ragas are indicated, out of 201 Padas of Meera in Parshuram Chaturvedi edition seventy ragas are indicated; Tulsidas Geetavali (Geeta Press edition) consists 330 Padas in which 22

Poets	Edition	Total no. of Padas	Total no. of Padas in which Ragas are indicated	No. of indicated Ragas
Kabir	Kabir Granthavali, Shyam Sundar Das,(ed) Lokbharti Prakashan, Allahabad 2 nd edition 2011	403	403	16
Surdas	Sursagar Satik, Hardev Bahari, Rajendra Kumar, (ed.) Lokbharti Prakashan, Allahabad, Feb, 1991	343 (Pratham Skandh)	324	28
Meera	Meerabai ki Padavali, Parshuram Chaturvedi (ed.), Hindi Sahitya sammelan, Prayag, Allahabad, 19 th edition. 1993	201	115	70
Tulsidas	Geetavali, Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, Fourteenth edition, Samvat 2041	330	143	22
	Vinay Patrika, Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, 52 nd edition, Samvat 2057	279	46	23

ragas are mentioned and his Vinay Patrika (Geeta Press edition) consisting 279 Padas indicates 23 ragas; Surdas, for example if you take only first cantos (prathama skandha) out of 343 Padas, 28 ragas are indicated. [Table-2]

	Kabir (1400-1520)	Surdas (1479-1582)	Meera (1498-1562)	Tulsidas (1532-1623)	
				Geetavali	Vinay Patrika
Dhanashree	06	83	01	03	05
Sarang	02	55	05	07	02
Bilaval	12	35	03	11	05
Sorath	38	12	05	13	01
Kedar	20	26	00	28	01
Kanhara	00	19	01	12	01
Devchandhar	00	13	00	00	00
Ramkali	49	11	01	02	05
Malar	02	10	01	05	01
Nat	00	09	00	03	01
Asawari	60	09	01	08	02
Gauri	00	08	00	09	04
Bihag	00	01	04	00	00
Kalyan	01	04	00	06	02
Tori	02	03	01	08	01
Jait shree	00	02	00	09	02
Jhunjhoti	00	01	01	00	00
Maru	03	07	01	05	01
Piloo	00	00	06	00	00
paraj	00	02	03	00	00
Multani Dhanashree titala	00	02	00	00	00
Multani titala	00	01	01	00	00
Khambavati	00	01	00	00	00
Jungala titala	00	01	00	00	00
Gaudi	152	00	00	00	00
Mali Gaudi	03	00	00	00	00
Tilang	00	00	01	00	00
Hameer	00	00	03	00	00
Triveni	00	00	01	00	00

Ahiri	00	01	00	00	00
Nat narayan	00	01	00	00	00
Bihagro	00	05	00	00	00
Suha bilavali	00	01	00	00	01
Gujari	00	01	01	00	00
Vasant	13	00	00	03	03
Bhairav	37	00	00	02	02
Vibhas	00	00	00	01	01
Lalit	03	00	02	04	01
Vihag bilaval	00	00	00	00	01
Bhairavi	00	00	02	00	01
Suho	00	00	01	03	02
Chanchari	00	00	00	01	00
Neelambari	00	00	02	00	00
Kamod	00	00	02	00	00
Tilang	00	00	01	00	00

Malkauns	00	00	01	00	00
Patmanjari	00	00	02	00	00
Gunkali	00	00	01	00	00
Mand	00	00	01	00	00
Dhani	00	00	02	00	00
Piloo barwa	00	00	01	00	00
Puria Kalyan	00	00	02	00	00
Khamach	00	00	02	00	00
Agana	00	00	01	00	00
Pahadi	00	00	04	00	00
Jaunpuri	00	00	02	00	00
Sohani	00	00	01	00	00
Bihagara	00	00	01	00	00
Shyam Kalyan	00	00	01	00	00
Darbari	00		01	00	00
Kanadi	00	00	02	00	00
Puria Dhanashree	00	00	01	00	00
Jogiya	00	00	01	00	00

Holi	00	00	05	00	00
Sukh-sorath	00	00	01	00	00
sawan	00	00	02	00	00
Sawani-kalyan	00	00	01	00	00
Bageshwari	00	00	01	00	00
Anand bhairav	00	00	01	00	01
Desh	00	00	04	00	00
Dhun lavani	00	00	01	00	00
Alaiya	00	00	01	00	00
Prabhathi	00	00	04	00	00
Sindhu bhairavi	00	00	01	00	00
Bhimpalashi	00	00	01	00	00
Kosi	00	00	03	00	00
Kalingra	00	00	01	00	00
Nat bilawal	00	00	01	00	00
Malhar	00	00	01	00	00
Chaya todi	00	00	01	00	00
Kanadi	00	00	01	00	00
Ragshree	00	00	02	00	00
Kafi	00	00	01	00	00
Hans Narayan	00	00	01	00	00
Holi jhinjhoti	00	00	01	00	00
Durga	00	00	01	00	00
Dhamar	00	00	01	00	00
Sudh sarang	00	00	01	00	00
Chaya	00	00	01	00	00

[Table-3]

As above chart [Table-3] shows, in comparison to other three poets Meera had used maximum varieties of raga-s though she had written minimum number of pada-s. If we agree to critics general evaluation and complaint of her limited experience and monotony in her poetry¹⁶; indication of varieties of raga-a in her oeuvre is quite understandable. Contrary to this Kabir is considered to be well informed¹⁷ and like Narsimha a witness of varied and most impossible of situations¹⁸ but no wonder he indicates, in comparison to other three poets most limited varieties of raga-s. Can we draw a conclusion from this example that indication

of raga-s had different meaning for different poets? For someone like Meera, it was a device, it seems to compensate one's limited experience and exposure; since every raga has a distinct form that interprets or colours the sensibilities of the text in a distinct way ;so consequently the varieties- in raga-s turn out to be varieties -in -sensibilities. Whereas poets like Kabir, Tulsi or Surdas draw no extra weight or attention to it as its quality to expand the sensibility is not much needed. This argument can also be substantiated by the number of raga-s specific to individual poets---in case of Meera ,its number is fifty whereas Surdas has six and Kabir & Tulsi three each. [Table-4]

Poets	Five Most Preferred Raga-s in terms of its usage					No. of Ragas Common among All four poets	No. of Ragas specific to Individual Poets
Kabir	Gaudi (152)	Asavari (60)	Ramkali (49)	Sorathi (38)	Bhairav (37)	09	03
Surdas	Dhanashree (83)	Sarang (55)	Bilaval (35)	Kedar (26)	Kanhara (19)	09	06
Meera	Piloo (6)	Sarang (5)	Bihag (4)	Sorath (4)	Bilaval (3)	09	50
Tulsidas	Kedara (29)	Bilaval (16)	Kanhara (13)	Gauri (13)	Jaitshree (11)	09	03

[Table-4]

Common Raga-s	Kabir (1400-1520)	Surdas (1479-1582)	Meera (1498-1562)	Tulsidas (1532-1623)
Dhanashree	06	83	01	08
Asavari	60	09	01	10
Sarang	02	55	05	09
Sorath	38	12	05	14
Ramkali	49	11	01	07
Bilaval	12	35	03	16
Malar	02	10	01	06
Maru	03	07	01	06
Todi	02	03	01	09

[Table-5]

The Common ragas among these four major poets of Bhakti-period are: Dhanashree, Asavari, Sarang, Sorath, Ramkali, Bilawal, Malar, Maru and Todi [Table-5]. There are two issues here: first either we see the structure of a particular raga, what it 'expresses' by its constituent notes and then see its concordances with the contents of a particular poem in a synchronic way or secondly try to perceive a particular raga and corresponding particular poem in a diachronic setting since neither raga's structure nor poem's meaning is static. To acquire the data for this later approach is very difficult----it is almost impossible to ascertain the very structure of the raga-s during the medieval performances and how our Bhakti poets perceived it at that point of time to determine their poem's communicability in it. From early twentieth century, when gramophone companies started recording here we have enough data that shows that singers hardly followed the indicated raga-s for their renderings of Bhakti poets. May be, Change in sensibilities has changed the meaning of the poems or interpretation of raga-s or perhaps both. Let us see the example of raga Bilawal. Bilawal is a morning raga to be sung in between 6to9 A.M. preferably in rainy season with a feeling of deep devotion and repose. It was a popular raga in the medieval period .No wonder Over 170 hymns were composed to this raga in the Adi- Granth by Guru Nanak, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur. It became later a basic *thaat* (musical mode) in Hindustani classical music. Bilawal is considered by most to be of *Sampurna - Sampurna jaati*. However, some are of the opinion that it should be considered *Shadav - Sampurna* due to the weakness of its 'Ga' in the arohana. In its Aroha(ascending) Sa Re Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni, Sa, swaras and in Awaroha(descending) Sa, Ni Dha, Pa, Ma Ga, Re Sa swaras are used; its vadi is Dha and samvadi- Ga and chalan or pakad is : Ga Re, Ga Ma Dha Pa, Ma Ga, Ma Re Sa.

Tulsi Das's 'Vinaya Patrika' begins with a hymn to lord Ganesha in this raga:

गाइए गनपति जगबन्दन । संकर-सुवन भवानी-नन्दन॥
 सिद्धि-सदन, गज-बदन, बिनायक । कृपा-सिन्धु, सुन्दर, सब-लायक॥
 मोदक-प्रिय, मुद-मंगल-दाता । विद्या-बारिधि, बुद्धि-बिधाता॥
 माँगत तुलसिदास कर जोरे । बसहिं रामसिय मानस मोरे ।¹⁹

Surdas also begins his *manglacharan* in raga Bilawal:

चरन कमल बन्दौ हरि राइ । जाकी कृपा पंगु गिरि लंघै अन्धे कौ सब कछु दरसाइ॥²⁰

Meera's Raga Bilawal starts

आवो मनमोहनाजी मीठी थारो बोल॥ टेक ॥

बालपनाँ की प्रीत रमैया जी, कदे नाहिं आयो थारो तोल ।

दरसन विण मोहि जकण परत है, चित मेरो डावाँडोल ।

मीराँ कहै मैं भई बावरी, कही बजाउँ ढोल ॥¹⁰⁰ ॥²¹

Kabir pada in rag Bilawal is as follows:

बार बार हरि का गुण गावै, गुर गमि भेद सहर का पावै । टेक ।²²

If we analyze these poems, there is a kind of similarity in their contents as well as in their forms and it can well be suited with its indicated raga as defined above. But in present time, take for example Tulsidas first Ganesha hymn that is very popular across the musical genres hardly anybody sings it in raga Bilawal. Three symptomatic examples can be cited: first Ashwini Bhide's rendering in rag Bihag,²³ second Pandit Rajan and Sajan Mishra's in rag Kirwani²⁴ and thirdly Ahnmed Hussain and Muhammad Husain's²⁵ in rag Marwa. Let us see and compare these three ragas with the raga Bilawal:

Raga	Nature	Jati	Singing time
Bilawal	devotional	Sampurna - Sampurna	Morning
Bihag	serious	Audav-sampoorna	Late night
Kirwani	melancholic	Sampurna - Sampurna	Mid-night
Marwa	contemplative	Shadav-Shadav	Sun set

[Table-6]

All these three raga-s, as table shows are so different in nature that its suitability for the above mentioned poem could be analyzed only on the ground that raga is too like a poem and that can be interpreted in multiple ways. But question remains what purpose it serves for the communication of the poetry or of raga---- is it poetry in raga-s or raga-s in poetry?

Notes & References

1. "गान्धर्व त्रिविधं विद्यात् स्वरतालपदात्मकम्" Dr.R.S. Nagar (ed.), *Natyasastra of Bharatmuni, with the commentary Abhinav Bharati*, vol.4, 28/11, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 1998,
2. "किन्त्वन्यथा तस्य (पदस्य) प्राधान्यं गानेऽन्यथा च गान्धर्वे । तत्र हि स्वरतालौ प्रधानम् । तौ चनाधारौ न शक्यौ प्रयोक्तुमित्याधारया यदुपयोगि तदाह स्वर्तालानुभावकमिति।" (अभिनव-भारती), *ibid*, p.302
3. "एक एव तु प्रकारः कलाविधिना निबध्यमानो राघवविजयमारीचवधादिकं रागकाव्यभेदमुद्भावयतीति । यथोक्त (कोहलेन) ---
"लयांतरप्रयोगेण रागैश्चापि विवेचितम् ।
नानारसं सुनिर्वाहम् कथं काव्यमिति स्मृतम् ॥
लयतश्चास्य गीत्याधारत्वेनाप्राधान्ये गीतेरेव प्राधान्यमिति न काव्यार्थविपर्यासवशेन रागभाषादिविपर्यासो नाट्य इव ।
तथा हि राघवविजयस्य हि ठक्करागेणैव विचित्रवर्णीयत्वेऽपि निर्वाहः । मारीचवधस्य ककुभग्रामरागेणैव । अतएव रागकाव्यानीत्युच्यन्त एतानि ।
रागो गीत्यात्मकत्वास्तव (कः स्व) रस्य तदाधारभूतं काव्यमिति ।" Dr.R.S. Nagar(ed.), *Ibid*, p.184.
4. राधावल्लभ त्रिपाठी, संस्कृत साहित्य का अभिनव इतिहास, विश्वविद्यालय प्रकाशन, वाराणसी, प्रथम संस्करण 2001, पृ.205
5. गणपति चन्द्र गुप्त, साहित्यिक निबन्ध, लोकभारती प्रकाशन, इलाहाबाद, पृ. 364
6. The Adigranth is a compiled work of five centuries (12th to 17th) and its final editing was completed in 1604 but earlier manuscripts also indicate Ragas.
7. आदिग्रन्थ, महीप सिंह, राजपाल एंड संस, दिल्ली, प्रथम संस्करण 2009, पृ.28-29
8. Ali S. Asani, *At the crossroads of Indic and Iranian Civilizations: Sindhi Literary Cultures in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), Literary Cultures in History, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, California, 2003, p.633*
9. करोति काव्यं प्रायेण संस्कृतात्मा यथा तथा।
पठितुं वेति स परं यस्य सिद्धा सरस्वती ॥ राजशेखर, काव्यमीमांसा, बिहार राष्ट्रभाषा परिषद, पटना, तृतीय संस्करण, 2000, पृ. 82
10. This is also worth-mentioning here that ritikalin poetry does not mention either raga's name or chhanda's name but Bhartendu tries it again in 19th century----he not only indicates ragas but chhanda's name also and sometimes both in the same text. In Chayavad both Sumitranandan Pant and Suryakant Tripathy 'Nirala' thought necessary to delve over the relationship between Chand and Rasa in the poetry albeit from different angles.
11. काव्ये रसानुसारेण वर्णनानुगुणेन च ।
कुर्वीत सर्ववृत्तानां विनियोगं विभागवित् ॥7 ॥ क्षेमेन्द्र, सुवृत्ततिलकम्, चौखम्बा संस्कृत सीरिज आफिस, वाराणसी, प्रथम संस्करण, 1968, पृ.109
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